

**Prepared Remarks of FCC Commissioner Mignon Clyburn**  
**2013 WTA Spring Meeting**  
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Thank you Derrick for that kind introduction and it is such a pleasure to join all of you this morning. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to speak with you for the very first time about our work at the Commission as well as the common goals we share.

For you see, we are all public stewards—y’all—I can get away with saying y’all in South Carolina and here in Texas—are ensuring that your local communities are served with high-quality communications networks and back at the ranch in Washington, D.C., I am working with my colleagues to develop and implement the best policies to ensure that *all* Americans are connected and no one is left behind.

Those goals, more often than not, are met with great challenges, but together I am convinced we can advance solutions that will have the biggest and best impact. To that end, all y’all—I hear that’s the plural here in Texas for y’all—are well represented by the leadership of WTA. Both Kelly and Derrick do a terrific job of bringing those issues to our attention and are working hard with us on how to best address those challenges.

For many years, we have been tasked by Congress with making communications services available nationwide for all. When the 1996 Telecommunications Act was passed, it actually required us to ensure that all Americans have access to affordable communications services. While 100 Meg service was not around then, the broad language of the Act stated that our goals would be “the preservation and advancement of universal service” for both traditional phone service and advanced services such as broadband communications. From this Act, I do not need to remind this audience, the Universal Service Fund was born.

During my FCC tenure, we have not only embraced its core goal of enhancing and preserving the availability of voice service, we have been steadfast in reforming and modernizing all four programs in the Fund for the broadband reality of today. Of course, I know that the adjustments made to the high-cost program have not come easy, but because of this, the Commission has been continuously mindful of considering modifications to the reforms as needed. But it’s very important that we look at the entire landscape and its parts as we evaluate the proposed adjustments. And in doing so, I believe it is crucial that we keep in front of mind any impact on our reform goals as laid out in the Order; namely, to promote advanced networks, to reduce waste, fraud and inefficiency, to require accountability, and the transition to incentive-based policies. I wholeheartedly embrace the principle that our actions must consider the impact on consumers, but in doing so, we must balance the needs of *all* consumers—those who are contributing, as well as those who are benefitting.

As some of you may know, it was very important to me that any proposed or realized high-cost reforms involve transition time, a glide path, meaning no flash cuts, and an opportunity for reconsideration for individual carriers where they could demonstrate impact on service capabilities and harm to consumers through a robust and engaged waiver process. To date, the Commission has received 12 waiver requests; our Bureau has acted on half of them and continues to work with carriers to resolve the others. I have encouraged staff to collaborate with carriers, to streamline the filing and review process, and to resolve issues as quickly as possible. My office, under the leadership of my legal adviser Angie Kronenberg, and I have been available to assist carriers through the review process and we remain committed to this goal.

Our implementation of the high-cost reform is well underway to address the needs of the 19 million Americans who still do not have access to broadband. We have distributed financial support for fixed and mobile broadband to areas that are unserved in Phase I, and Phase II is in process. It is critical that the Commission faithfully and responsibly implement the reforms so that we can continue to see the expansion of fixed and mobile networks to unserved consumers, and I remain committed to doing my part to see that through.

There are many issues on the Commission's plate right now—it's sort of like a Texas barbecue buffet, but not nearly as tasty. We are implementing the reforms for the Lifeline program, which were voted in January 2012 largely on a bi-partisan basis and made significant improvements to address waste, fraud, and abuse, while ensuring that those low-income consumers who continue to need financial assistance accessing voice service can do so. Over \$200 million was saved last year in this program as a result of our reforms and we estimate \$400 million will be saved this year.

In addition, we are in process of modernizing the Lifeline program by implementing a user database. I believe a database will do even more to ensure that there is no waste in this program and I am encouraged that we are moving on the duplicates functionality, and I continue to believe, that adding eligibility functionality is critical and must be done expeditiously. We also are funding some pilot projects to help us review the broadband needs of low-income consumers and to better address the significant adoption gap for this population. This is ground-breaking work in the Lifeline program and I am pleased to see that a variety of carriers are participating, including rural, rate-of-return carriers, for one-third of Americans have not adopted broadband at home and for those who are in the lower-income brackets, they are being left further behind and increasingly disadvantaged.

One of my last acts as Chair of the FCC's Federal-State Joint Conference on Advanced Services was to help coordinate and host a summit in February at the Commission to focus on the various adoption programs underway. We highlighted a number of successful projects and the latest academic thinking, and what we have learned so far is that adoption has slowed in recent years and those consumers who have yet to adopt have multiple reasons for not doing so. Cost remains a significant barrier and convincing those non-digital natives to get online, typically, involves a trusted local partner, digital literacy training, and subsidized services and equipment when affordability is an issue. But I am convinced that the Commission's Lifeline broadband pilot projects will lead to additional data for the Commission to study in order to further advance adoption, especially for low-income, senior and minority consumers. Moreover, I am encouraged by private sector efforts committed to increasing broadband adoption in disadvantaged communities.

It is a matter of fairness, one senior executive so aptly stated recently. These are the communities that can be helped the most by high-speed Internet access and the public and private sectors should continue to work together in order to better address this imperative. As a nation, we can ill-afford to leave anyone behind. The investments made in these networks should be put to their fullest use and that is simply not occurring for those on the digital sidelines. Imagine if our nation had deployed the electric grid but one-third of Americans didn't or couldn't purchase electric service—despite the fact that the networks run right down their streets and to their homes. I know and you know that we must continue to tackle this significant issue together. Not only for the sake of improving the economic opportunities of all citizens and communities but also for the sake of the public and private investments being made in the networks including the universal service funding.

The steps we have been taking to address the rural broadband needs also include reforming our Rural Healthcare program, a vote we took last December. The rural Healthcare Connect Fund implementation is underway and presents a unique opportunity for all of you to work with rural healthcare

providers. We are living longer, playing harder, working, residing and vacationing in places that not so long ago seemed out of reach. On top of and as a result of these trends with our healthcare bills rising and the demand for electronic health records becoming the norm, it is clear that broadband has the greatest potential to aid us in realizing the optimal efficiencies in healthcare service delivery, even in the most remote areas of this nation. So with the implementation of the Healthcare Connect Fund facilities in rural, currently underserved communities will now have opportunities to obtain desired broadband services allowing for better healthcare delivery to these areas.

As important as broadband is however, we cannot forget about our mandate to provide nationwide voice service. Shoring up our policies to ensure that voice calls are completed has been a priority for me. As many of you know, the Commission has taken several steps in this area. Most recently, we issued a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking as well as a consent decree to address rural call completion issues. Whether a telephone call is being made from across the street or across the nation, consumers expect them to be completed, so when calls are not timely received, not only is it frustrating, it is detrimental to those seeking to conduct business, is life-threatening to those in cases of emergency and it critical for those who need to convey time-sensitive personal information.

Call completion isn't simply about inconvenience, for we have heard first-hand about lost business and economic opportunities—which is especially detrimental to rural communities—of families unable to connect during times of crises and of very real public safety vulnerabilities. And I cannot emphasize enough both the public safety and economic impacts that I am committed to addressing as the Commission resolves this issue. I ask that you all continue to work with me on additional steps the Commission should take on rural call completion.

Again, as it relates to public safety, of course, this is a critical issue of which the Commission remains committed and active. We are continuing to review our country's critical communications needs particularly after significant natural disaster events and the FCC knows that it must keep working to improve the reliability of our nation's communications networks. When Congress created the FCC in 1934, it made one of the Commission's fundamental obligations "the promotion of safety of life and property through the use of wire and radio communications." The devastation and service outages caused by last summer's Derecho and Super Storm Sandy show that this obligation remains as vital today as it did almost eighty years ago. While we may not be able to prevent natural disasters, we can and must improve our Nation's ability to respond to these events.

We also are continuing to implement the provisions of recent laws. For example, in 2010, Congress passed and the President signed, the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act to ensure that all citizens, no matter their disability, have an opportunity to use the communications devices and services that fully-abled citizens take for granted. I am extremely proud of the work that the Commission has done for nearly 54 million citizens who so often struggle for access to services and adequate devices. And we also are implementing the provisions of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012, wherein Congress authorized the Commission to conduct incentive auctions of broadcast television spectrum to help meet the increasing wireless spectrum needs of the nation. It also sets directives for the establishment of the first nationwide wireless broadband public safety network.

You also may have heard that I have been personally active in promoting the Commission's review of phone rates that families of inmates must pay to stay in contact with their incarcerated loved ones. This is a very important proceeding that has the potential to benefit all of society. In many prisons throughout the nation the cost to stay in contact with distant relatives is much higher than the typical long distance call—in some cases up to \$17 for a 15-minute call. Every credible study has shown that close family connections help reduce recidivism rates; however, high inmate phone rates discourage this. Most of these families are low-income, often live hundreds and in some cases thousands of miles from the

facilities where their loved ones are held, making frequent in person visits nearly impossible. And then there are the children. Approximately 2.7 million children in the U.S. have lost at least one parent to incarceration, and any teacher or social worker will tell you the significant impact this has on them. This is an issue that the Commission is actively reviewing, and I fully expect that when our record is complete later this month, we will move quickly to address this situation.

As you can hear, there is a lot on our plate but, an incredible staff of about 1700 people are committed to serving the best interest of all Americans. I am very proud of the work we do and I want to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address you today.